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"The Art of Ageing" - a festival in Timisoara

Of the chances of aging

We are getting older. What can bring a long life with them, discussed theater projects and scientific presentations. West and - European - East, showed about to age differently.

by Sieglinde Geisel 02.05.2015



The world seen from the bed - supervisor and supervised in Nino Haratischwilis "Fen Fires".

"Today, the sexagenarian is old only in the bureaucratic sense," the 87-year Italian legal philosopher Norberto Bobbio wrote already in 1996. The physiological age begin to eighty, ie twenty years after the retirement eligibility. The collective aging of societies is one of the major challenges of our time. The European Theatre Convention (ETC) has devoted to a theater festival that took place now in Timisoara, in connection with a scientific conference. The western Romanian city would like 2020 European Capital of Culture will be - the renovations are in full swing, and one suspects that Timisoara with its Art Nouveau buildings, the spacious squares and parks to one of the most beautiful cities of Europe could be again.

The ETC is a theater network of currently 40 theaters from all over Europe; cooperation models between municipal and state theaters are developed, away from the festival operation of the independent scene since 1988 here. The challenge is not only in the coordination of various repertoires houses, but even more so in bilingualism on stage. For the festival, four

co-productions came into being, the results were shown in evening performances at the National Theatre Timisoara.

Increasing retirement age

The increase in life expectancy was "the biggest success story of all time," says the demographer George W. Leeson, Co-Director of the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, in his opening speech. Our collective aging - every hour increases the statistically calculated life expectancy of newborn in 15 minutes - is neither a problem nor a challenge. "It's an opportunity" lifelong learning is the speech and occupational change, because if the policy is also not wanted to admit it: the long term, the retirement age will have to be raised to 80 to 90 years and this at lower pensions, otherwise is pensions no longer financially viable. The fact that the life stages have been postponed, show about the rise in the divorce rate from 60. "The age is mainstream."

However, the theater is struggling with age: As is known, there is little roles for aging actors, and it seems no coincidence that the festival productions missed the topic of aging blatantly, except possibly by Nino Haratischwilis piece "Fen Fires" a co-production of the Deutsches Theater and the Slovak National Theatre. On stage we see a constellation, as it has become a matter of course. The bedridden, mentally awake, and gruff Lara is run by a woman from Eastern Europe: Once Natalia was in Slovakia a successful organist, now she has to rely on the work as a nurse. But the real theme of the play is not aging, but the story of a communist country in which the policy the private destroyed: Natalia's husband appears as a ghost, he was an intelligence agent and has life taken. The performance in Bratislava led last year to heated discussions about the past.

How do you get a piece in two languages on the stage? "Fen Fires" had with Emília Vášárová and Dušan Jamrich two stars of Slovak theater in the leading roles, speak excellent German. In Slovak are Natalia inner monologues and conversations with her husband reminded - in the language change an imaginary space suddenly opens up in the room. English toptitles ensured that the international composite festival audience - 120 theater professionals from all over Europe - could follow the action.

The most exciting production was a collaboration of the documentary collective work group 2 at the Brunswick State Theatre with the National Theatre of Craiova. "Strawberry orphans" consists of a collage of interviews with the invisible losers of labor migration, the 400 000. Children of strawberry pickers who are left behind by their parents. "Strawberry pickers" has established itself in the Romanian as a generic term for the 20 percent of Romanians who earn their money in the West. Most jump grandmothers, older siblings often assume the parenting role, sometimes there is no one. In a striking change between Romanian and German and in every conceivable style documents the role play the actresses and actors embody the trauma of all three generations. The piece "does something with the audience," says the actor Sven Hönig. In Romania, where hardly talked about the abandoned children, the issue was after the performance in Craiova at a time on television. In Germany, however, the audience questions after the presentation

concerned, what they could do - strawberries and asparagus in the supermarket have lost their innocence.

How can ageing become a chance? This question served as a starting point for the workshop held by the American theatre maker Stuart Kandell, who founded Stagebridge, America's oldest stage "for, by and of older adults" in San Francisco in 1978, and acted as its leader until recently. It is about conceiving ageing as an opportunity instead of a decline. In a video, Kandell introduced what kind of metamorphoses older adults can be capable of on stage. Pain and handicaps seem to be suddenly gone; the older adults discover completely new sides of their personality. For Kandell, "the creative work keeps them alive". The artistic aspiration is at the core of the work; it should not be perceived as a therapy. During exercises and short scenes, the workshop participants had the opportunity to experience their relation and perspective towards ageing. How do you walk when you are a child, when you are 30, and 80? What is your biggest fear when you think about ageing? What should be written on your grave?

West, east

Ageing as an opportunity - this is a luxury of the "Healthy Wealthy Westerners", as a conference participant put it. Despite the place where you were a guest, the meeting was largely limited to Western experience. In Romania, with a poverty rate of 25 percent, aging is anything but a success story: Here old people struggling in the face of inadequate pensions often a matter of simple survival, not to mention dignity. Even the ubiquitous phenomenon of "migrant carers" was only touched upon: Namely, by each country fetches the nurses for his growing age population from the next poor country, produced a fatal "care drain". The price of our strawberries, asparagus and the supply of Eastern European geriatric nurses pay not only the children but also the elderly in the countries of origin.